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DECLARATION

OF

THE SOCIETY OF PEOPLE,

(COMMONLY CALLED SHAKERS,)

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SHEWING

THEIR REASONS FOR REFUSING TO AID OR ABET THE CAUSE OF WAR AND BLOODSHED,

BY

BEARING ARMS, PAYING FINES, HIRING SUBSTITUTES, OR RENDERING ANY EQUIVALENT FOR MILITARY SERVICES.

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DECLARATION.

WE the Elders and Deacons or Trustees of the Society* of Believers (commonly called Shakers) of New-Lebanon and Watervliet, in the State of New-York, having taken into our most serious consideration the state of our Society, as it respects the unhappy war in which this country is engaged, take the liberty for and in behalf of the Society, to address the following sentiments to the civil and military officers of this State, as our reasons for refusing to aid or abet the cause of war and bloodshed, by bearing arms, paying military fines, hiring substitutes or rendering any equivalent for military services.

Our objections are founded on a sense of duty to God, to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures; and are supported first, by divine revelation; second, by the natural rights of man; third, by the Constitution and fundamental laws of our country.

1. Our duty to God is paramount to all other duties; and is made known to us by the revelation of divine light only. This being given of God, establishes in us a principle from which we cannot deviate without a direct violation of that law which is planted in our souls by the finger of God himself, and which we properly call *conscience*, or the throne of God in the heart of man. This duty may be great or small in proportion to the degree of light given: for, *to whom much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom little is given, of him little shall be required.*

It is immaterial to us in what way or manner the mind and will of God is revealed to us, provided we are convinced that it is, in truth, his mind and will; perfect obedience thereunto being our indispensable duty. That God has required of us to abstain from all acts of violence against the lives of our fellow-creatures, is a truth in which we are as firmly established as we are that there

* Though the Believers of New-Lebanon and Watervliet form two Societies; yet we have chosen to adopt the term *Society*, in the singular, as comprehending all of our community in this State, who are associated upon the principles of a joint compact.

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is a God, who has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, and through him to all his true followers. Considering ourselves called to be such, and having enlisted under the banners of this King of kings and Lord of lords, who has expressly declared that his Kingdom is not of this world, and which he assigns as a reason that his servants would not fight, we feel ourselves impelled, by the most sacred and solemn obligations, to abstain from all acts that tend to aid or abet the cause of war.

Therefore, being fully convinced of the call of God to us, we consider it our indispensable duty to obey this call, and to sacrifice every other consideration that may stand in competition with it. And being called into the Kingdom of Christ now established on earth,* it is required of us to be faithful soldiers in his cause, even at the expense of our lives. We cannot therefore render service to any authority which stands in competition with his will. He has expressly declared that, *The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*† And it is evident that, both in precept and example, he utterly forbid all acts of violence against the lives of mankind.

But it may be objected by the advocates of war, that wars have not only been tolerated, but even authorized by God himself; many examples of which are recorded in the sacred writings, under the Mosaic dispensation. True; but it ought to be considered that wars arising from the ambitious and revengeful passions of mankind, or even from the professedly more reasonable causes of supporting and defending certain supposed rights, (whether real or imaginary,) differ very essentially from wars authorized by the command of God. Those wars, authorized under the dispensation of types and shadows, were figurative‡ of the spiritual warfare of God's people against the corrupt and contentious passions of human nature, which must be subdued by and in every true follower of Christ. And it is evident that when Christ came, he abolished the law of types and shadows, and established a new law§ for the government of his followers, and said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, [under the law] Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy: But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you," &c.‖ This we can-

* The Kingdom of heaven is within or *among* you. Luke xvii. 21.
† Luke ix. 56. ‡ Heb. x. 1. § Heb. viii. 6—10. ‖ Matt. v. 43, 44.

not do while we are promoting their destruction. *Put up thy sword into the sheath——Thou shalt not kill.** This command of our Creator, no human authority can disannul. None but he that gave life, can give authority to take it away.

Christ is called *The Prince of peace*;† and his work was to put an end to war, and establish a Kingdom of peace. And as we are called to be the subjects of his Kingdom, we feel it our duty to obey the laws of the King of Kings, rather than the authority of any earthly government which tends to counteract his precepts. And should we once consent to aid the cause of war, we should, from that moment, view ourselves as traitors to the cause of Christ; and as such, should justly forfeit and inevitably lose the life of Christ out of our souls.

It may be asked, Cannot a man be a Christian, and yet bear arms in defence of his country? To which we answer, Christ has expressly said, "No man can serve two masters."‡ And every rational man will readily acknowledge that it is impossible for a soldier to serve the cause of two governments, whose interests, institutions and civil policy are altogether incompatible with each other. Is it not then much more inconsistent, yea, impossible, for a soldier of the Prince of peace, whose divine Master's policy is to save life and diffuse the blessings of peace and happiness, to serve the cause of the Prince of war and bloodshed, or of any earthly government whose object is to destroy life, and which must naturally extend the calamities of war and misery among mankind?

The Prince of peace has plainly said, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.§" Therefore, because his Kingdom is not of this world, his servants cannot be allowed to fight. *Follow me——Every one that is perfect shall be as his master.*‖ And it is evident that the Apostles and primitive Christians did follow his example, were governed by his laws and precepts, and would not take arms, nor aid the cause of war; but when called upon for that purpose, they answered, "We are already soldiers of Christ, and cannot serve any other power."¶ This refusal on their part was one principal cause of persecution, and often cost them their lives.

* John xviii. 11. Ex. xx. 13. † Isa. ix. 6. ‡ Matt. vi. 24.
§ John xviii. 36. ‖ Luke vi. 40. ¶ Wright's Martyrology, vol I.

As before observed, we have enlisted under the banners of Christ; hence we consider ourselves as his soldiers, engaged in his cause; and therefore cannot swerve from our duty as such, to serve any cause incompatible with his. If it should be asked, what is our warfare, seeing we claim the character of soldiers? We answer, Our warfare is the warfare of Christ, the great Captain of our salvation. It is a warfare against the darkness of this world. And this warfare we maintain by setting the example in our lives, conduct and conversation, in all things, of subduing and governing the evil passions and propensities of human nature, which are productive of sin and misery, of which the spirit of war is the worst; being the cause of the greatest calamities and the most multiplied distresses that ever were inflicted upon the human race. Therefore we cannot deviate from a course of life which has a tendency to diminish these calamities, without being traitors to him who has called and chosen us. Agreeable to this is the language of the Apostle, when he says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal——We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, &c."*

It may be said, If all the people in the United States were of this opinion, and acted upon these principles, the enemy would overcome the country. We answer; This plea is similar to that of the Jews against Jesus Christ, viz. "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation."† This plea of the Jews is an undeniable proof that the disciples of Jesus would not bear arms; for otherwise they might have been as serviceable against the Romans as their unbelieving neighbours. Yet, notwithstanding this hostile plea of the Jews against the Saviour of the world, it is evident that the very cause of their place and nation's being taken away by the Romans, was their rejecting the day of their visitation, and persecuting the promised Messiah and his followers‡ And we are firmly persuaded that those who subject themselves to the cross of Christ, and after his example, subdue those evil propensities which lead to war and strife, render more essential service to their country than they possibly could do by

* 2 Cor. x. 4. Ephe. vi. 12. † John xi. 48.

‡ See Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem. Luke xix. 41—44

bearing arms and aiding war. For it must be granted, that to live such a life, requires a superior degree of virtue; and God himself declared to Abraham, that ten righteous souls would have saved Sodom from destruction.†

But it may be asked, Shall we not defend ourselves in time of actual invasion? Or must we hazard the conquest and destruction of our country by a tenacious adherence to these principles? Will our religion protect us?

We answer; Were mankind divested of pride and ambition, all wars would cease. The professors of Christianity are looking for a time when, according to ancient prediction, there shall be universal peace; when implements of war shall be transformed into implements of peace. But how is this great event to be brought about? We believe, beyond all controversy, that God has called us to this very work; and that it is required of us to set the example of peace, and to maintain it at all hazards. And though the work, in its present stage, may appear very small and inconsiderable, perhaps even contemptible in the eyes of mankind; yet it ought to be remembered that every important dispensation of the work of God, always had a small beginning, and increased through the labours and example of its subjects.

As we are confident that the all important æra has commenced, which in its progress will fully establish that universal peace, so long predicted; so we are equally confident, that every faithful subject of this work will be protected by the interposition of heaven, without the use of arms. And would any country or nation conform to the principles of perfect justice and moral rectitude, and confide in the protection of Divine Providence, instead of relying on the force of arms, they might be as well protected in this day, as in ancient dispensations. For it is worthy of observation, that under the dispensation of types and shadows, when wars were tolerated by divine authority, the greatest deliverances were wrought without the use of sword or spear. Witness the deliverance of the children of Israel from the Egyptians; and also that of the kingdom of Judah, under the reign of Jehoshaphat, from the greatest coalition that perhaps ever exist-

† Gen. xviii. 32.

od ;* with many instances of the like nature, recorded in the sacred writings, and other ancient records, as well as others of a more recent date. It is therefore evident, that the injustice, pride and ambition of man, in confiding in his own strength, is the very cause of his not receiving the protection of an over-ruling Providence against his enemies in this day.

II Upon the principle of rights, asserted in the act of our country called the Declaration of Independence, and which are therein termed *unalienable*, we feel ourselves authorized to maintain, *That all souls whom God has created are free, and have a right to believe according to their own conviction, and to act according to their own faith.* Agreeable to this right, we consider ourselves at full liberty to worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, and to devote ourselves and services to him in whatever way and manner we believe to be most agreeable to his will. Hence we feel ourselves fully authorized to dissolve all engagements, whether natural, civil or political, that may interfere with, or obstruct us in our obedience to the requirement of our divine Lord and Master; and upon this plain principle, that we ought to obey God rather than man. And whoever would forcibly hinder or impede any person from thus acting, would, in so doing, subvert the right of conscience, and act in direct opposition to the fundamental principles of every free government.

In pursuance of this right therefore, and from a settled conviction that it is the requirement of God, we have solemnly dedicated and devoted ourselves and services, together with all our temporal interest, to sacred and charitable purposes. And by a written Covenant we have stipulated the object and manner of this dedication, and solemnly bound ourselves to the sacred performance of the same: as may be seen in the following extracts from the said Covenant.

"ART. IV. We——solemnly and conscientiously dedicate, devote and give up ourselves and services, together with all our

* Jehoshaphat commanded an army of 1,160,000 men, besides those who were set to guard the fenced cities. See 2 Chron. xvii. 14 to the end. Yet, notwithstanding this immense military force, he said, "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us." See chap. xx. 12. Hence we may conclude that the coalition formed against him must have been without a parallel.

temporal interest, to God and his people; to be under the care and direction of such Elders, Deacons or Trustees as have been, or may hereafter be established in the said Society, according to the first Article of this Covenant."

"ART. VI. We further covenant and agree, that it is, and shall be the special duty of the Deacons or Trustees———to appropriate, use and improve the said joint interest, for the benefit of the said Society, for the relief of the poor, and for such other charitable and religious purposes as the gospel may require, and the said Deacons or Trustees, in their wisdom, shall see fit: *Provided nevertheless*, that all the transactions of the said Deacons or Trustees, in their use, management and disposal of the aforesaid joint interest, shall be for the benefit and privilege, and in behalf of the whole body of said Society, (to which the said Deacons or Trustees are, and shall be held responsible,) and not for any personal or private interest, object or purpose whatever."

"ART. VIII.———We do, by virtue of this Covenant, solemnly and conscientiously, jointly and individually, for ourselves, our heirs and assigns, promise and declare, in the presence of God and each other, and to all men, that we will never hereafter, neither directly nor indirectly, make nor require any account of any interest, property, labour or service, which has been, or may be devoted by us, or any of us, to the purposes aforesaid; nor bring any charge of debt or damage, nor hold any demand whatever against the said Society, nor against any member or members thereof, on account of any property or service given, rendered, devoted or consecrated to the aforesaid sacred and charitable purposes."

Our persons and property having been, for many years, thus devoted and consecrated to God, we cannot therefore appropriate either to any use not comprehended in this Covenant, without committing the crime of sacrilege: nor can it be required by any existing law of man. In all ages of the world, both under the law and gospel, and even among heathen nations, whatever has been devoted to sacred and pious uses, has been regarded as consecrated and irredeemable.

In the Levitical law it was declared, that whatever was devoted to sacred use, whether persons or property, should never be re-

deemed; and because it was consecrated to the Lord, it was thenceforth considered as dead to every other end and purpose And so tenacious were the Jews of this principle, that they considered no calamity so great, and no crime so awful as the violation of consecrated property. Such property, among them, was often signally protected, or the violation of it signally punished by the interposition of Divine power. Witness the calamity brought upon the Philistines, for seizing and carrying away the Ark of the Lord, in the days of the prophet Samuel:* and also the miraculous protection of the treasures, which had been consecrated to sacred and charitable purposes, in the Temple at Jerusalem, in the days of Onias the high priest.† Hence the sacred Temple and its consecrated treasures were held in the highest veneration, by that chosen people, so long as they continued to walk in obedience to the divine laws and precepts, enjoined upon them by their great Law-giver.

It is unnecessary to multiply examples in support of this principle, since it is a well known truth, that consecrated property, by the general consent of mankind, in all ages, has been held sacred to the purpose for which it was devoted. As the Jewish dispensation was typical of the dispensation of the gospel, in which the true Church of Christ is considered as the sacred Temple of God, and the consecrated property of the members its visible treasure; so we view this Temple and its treasure, as much more sacred than that of the Jews, as the substance is more sacred than its shadow.

Objections may be raised against the total and absolute consecration of the property and personal services of a whole society; that it is inconsistent with civil policy, and may prove injurious to the community, and therefore cannot be authorized by Divine Providence: that no other denomination of christians ever pretended to assume the privilege of devoting the whole property of their society, and all their personal services to sacred uses: that the ministers of religion and a certain portion of property, for divine services, being all that is generally found necessary to be devoted to sacred purposes.

That such a consecration is inconsistent with *good* policy, or injurious to the community, is an objection without any founda-

* 1 Sam. ch. v. † 2 Macc. ch. iii.

tion in truth: facts prove the reverse, as will soon appear. The example of others, unless it can be proved to be more virtuous than our own, can form no objection against us. It certainly argues a greater degree of virtue for a man to devote his *whole* service and property to sacred purposes, than a *part* only; and he is as fully authorized, both by the laws of God and the rights of man, to do the former as the latter. It must be granted that one man has as good a right to dedicate himself and service to the Lord as another. He has also as good a right to devote his property as his services. And a whole Society must have as good a right as an individual to do the same: for every true follower of Christ is a practical preacher of righteousness to the fallen race of man: as saith the Apostle, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood."* Having therefore a part in this ministry and priesthood, they have a moral and religious right to claim an exemption from political and military affairs. Convinced that we are called of God into this distinguished work, therefore, agreeable to this calling, we have and do abstain from the politics of the world, and from all the honours and emoluments of office.

This refusal on our part to intermeddle with political affairs is, by some, made an objection to our claim to the right of exemption from military services, upon the ground that if peace be our object, we ought to aid its cause by voting for such public officers as will be disposed to promote that object. But should we do this, we should unquestionably have no more claim to the right of exemption than any other people; since we should thereby involve ourselves in the political affairs of the world, and consequently obligate ourselves, equally with them, to support the measures of government, which may tend to war as well as to peace. But it ought to be remembered that Christ has said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." And we cannot, as we have already shewn, intermeddle with the affairs of both. The candid will therefore readily acknowledge that this refusal is a clear evidence of our sincere and entire devotion to the service of God; since it must appear obvious to every one, that otherwise we should naturally be as ambitious of honor and distinction in the political world as the rest of our fellow men. So far then

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

from being an objection to our claim, it is an additional proof of the justice and equity of it.

It may be said by some, that our object in claiming an exemption from military services, and from paying an equivalent, proceeds from a parsimonious desire of screening ourselves from public expenses. But no person who is acquainted with our Society, can reasonably draw this conclusion; because such must know that we have given sufficient proof to the contrary.

We do not wish to make an ostentatious display of our liberality, by proclaiming to the world our acts of benevolence and charity; but as a reasonable plea of the right of exemption from military services, we deem it expedient to show that we have rendered more essential service to our country, by the nature and tendency of our institutions, and by our voluntary acts of benevolence, than we possibly could do by supporting the war, even if it were not contrary to our faith.

In the first place, by maintaining our own poor, the towns to which we belong are wholly released from that charge; which probably would be much more every year than the amount of our annual muster fines. This may easily be conceived by considering the expense of supporting the number of paupers that would probably be found among upwards of six hundred people, allowing them to be on an average with the ordinary state of society.

Secondly. As public donations for the relief of the suffering inhabitants of New-York, Portsmouth, and other places, who had been distressed by pestilential fevers, fire, war, earthquakes,* &c. we have sent, from time to time, in money, provisions, &c. to the amount of nearly four thousand dollars, exclusive of private donations and continual acts of charity to the suffering poor, the widow and the fatherless within our vicinity, and to other objects of charity, who are continually applying for assistance from various parts of the country, the amount of which cannot be correctly ascertained, but at a very moderate calculation must exceed 1000 dollars a year.†

Thirdly. The money expended and labour performed, in making and repairing the public roads and building bridges in

* This alludes to the inhabitants of Caraccas, in South-America, who suffered by Earthquakes.

† This reckoned for 30 years past, amounts to more than 30,000 dollars.

our vicinity, over and above our legal taxation, allowing five shillings for each day's work, amounts to more than four thousand dollars.

Fourthly. Those whom we send out as missionaries, instead of taking contributions from others, or being chargeable to those among whom they are sent, their expenses are defrayed by the Society. In this way we have expended many thousands of dollars.

When it is considered that these sums, thus expended, are not drawn from the avails of trade or the profits of speculation; (for with these we have nothing to do;) but are the fruits of honest industry, it will readily be acknowledged, by every candid, considerate person, that the consecration of our property and personal services to sacred and benevolent purposes, so far from being inconsistant with good policy, or injurious to the community, is in fact, directly the reverse. But as we have performed these acts agreeable to our own faith and sense of duty to God and man, we claim no honour on this account: nor are they mentioned with any other view than as proofs of our sincerity, and evidences of our just claim to the right of exemption from that service which is contrary to every feeling of our souls, and which unavoidably deprives us of property devoted to sacred and benevolent purposes. We believe these things are not generally known and considered.*

* Whatever some may imagine to the contrary, we as a people, are not exempt from those calamities which unavoidably attend a state of war. A large Society of our people in the Indiana Territory has suffered much. In the time of General Harrison's campaign against the Indians, several divisions of his army, at different times, encamped in that Society; in consequence of which they suffered the loss of nearly all their living, and the whole Society, which consisted of nearly 400 people were obliged to perform a journey of several hundred miles through the wilderness, under great sufferings and difficulty, to seek a shelter among the Brethren of their own Society, in the states of Ohio and Kentucky. Their damage and loss, which consisted mostly in grain, cattle and other articles of provision, consumed and taken away by the army, exclusive of what was paid for, was supposed to exceed 10,000 dollars; the whole of which was borne without assistance from any other source than the people of our denomination. The weight of these things we feel; and we are not idle spectators of the multiplied calamities which are visited upon mankind; and as our duty requires, we faithfully endeavour to alleviate the sufferings of our fellow-creatures, not by saying, *Be ye fed and be ye clothed;* but by actually ministering to their necessities. To this we may add, that our Society has

But it is argued that government is necessary for the protection of civil society, and therefore must be supported; that we are as much protected by the government, and can as well avail ourselves of the protection of the civil law as any other people; and therefore ought to bear our proportion of the public burthens.

We answer in the words of the Apostle, "We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient."* Those who will not be governed by the law of Christ, must submit to the laws of man. But there is no need of the compulsion of human laws to govern those who are governed by the laws of Christ: for they violate no law, nor even disobey any, that does not stand in competition with the law of God.

We grant that civil government is necessary in the present state of the world. And it is to the providential work of God we owe the establishment of those benign institutions by which our civil and religious rights are protected; we have a right, therefore, to avail ourselves of these; and for the civil protection which they afford us, we willingly render tribute to whom tribute is due. For this we have the example of Christ, who permitted Peter to pay tribute for him as well as for himself.†

But it is said, civil government cannot be supported without military aid; and if the government which protects our civil rights, is exposed to foreign invasion, why should we not defend it by force of arms? To which we answer.

As we are the subjects of the Kingdom of Christ, who have separated ourselves from the politics of earthly governments; we have therefore nothing to do with their protection and defence against foreign invasion. The only benefit we claim of the government is, protection against the abuses of those lawless members of society who violate its internal regulations. For this we pay liberally; and what more can justly be required of us? We are the friends of our country and its government; but we are also the friends of man: and the principles of true Christianity inculcate universal benevolence and good will to all the human

never been any expense to the government, for we have never employed its aid in the regulation or support of our own concerns.

* 1 Tim. i. 8, 9. † Matt. xvii. 27.

family; therefore we cannot, by a partial connection with one community, assist in the destruction of another. But if the subjects of any government think war to be necessary, or for their interest, and have given the government power to declare it, they have a right, according to their own laws, to make war and support it, and on them rests the responsibility. It is not for us to direct the conduct of those whose faith it is to bear arms and shed blood; we are not called to condemn them; to their own master they stand or fall. All we claim is liberty of conscience for ourselves; and we are willing that all others should enjoy the same.

We are however, far from believing war to be necessary for the support of civil government. It is worthy of remark that, according to all the records of history, both ancient and modern, those nations which have most cultivated the arts of war, and for a season, have had the greatest success in arms, have eventually met with the most signal destruction by the same means. On the other hand, those nations which have been the most averse to war, and whose chief object has been to cultivate the arts of peace and cherish the principles of virtue, have enjoyed the greatest tranquility, and the highest degree of national prosperity. Many examples might be adduced to prove the truth of this remark, which are powerful evidences that the spirit of war, instead of being a benefit, is most destructive to a nation. This also verifies the words of Solomon, "He that diggeth a pit, shall fall therein; and those of Christ, "They that take the sword, shall perish by the sword."

It is granted by some, that we ought to be exempt from personal services; but still they insist that we ought to pay a tax as an equivalent. But we would ask, What is this but indirectly supporting the cause of war? And should we consent to do this, it would be a virtual acknowledgement, that government has a right to require our support of a cause which our consciences condemn: or in other words, that liberty of conscience is not our natural right; but may be purchased of government at a stated price. Such a concession involves in it a principle derogatory to the Almighty; because it requires us to purchase of government liberty to serve God with our persons, at the expense of sinning against him with our property. This we cannot do. And certainly, if the government requires of us that which would be a

direct violation of our consciences, it claims a power which the Almighty does not.

It ought to be remembered that conscience is the throne of God in man; and whoever usurps authority over conscience, usurps the throne of God. Nay more; whoever requires the violation of conscience, exalts himself above God and all that is called God.* It is a truth, clearly supported by reason and revelation, that God never required any more of man than obedience to the dictates of his own conscience. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*†—*This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*‡

It has been asserted that liberty of conscience respects religious opinions and worship only; and not our duty as members of the community at large. But let it be remembered that God requires the whole heart, mind and strength. Therefore our duty to him requires not merely opinions, and the seasons and acts of religious worship; but all our time and talents, together with the use and improvement of all our temporal property. Hence our duty as men and members of civil society is, to do all that we do to the honour and glory of God, and for the good of our fellow creatures, agreeable to his will.

Since the establishment of our Society in this State, we have paid to the amount of 4000 dollars in military fines. And we have sufficient evidence that a large portion of this sacrifice has never benefited the State. Whereas, if we had been left to dispose of this money according to our own faith and covenant, it might have been a great benefit to the community, by relieving the distressed. This then, is certainly robbing the poor, the widow and the fatherless; the relieving of whom is one great object of our association. Nay more; is it not robbing God? since these sums were drawn from consecrated property §

We have heretofore paid muster fines in time of peace, for peace' sake, being unwilling to make difficulty; though we have always remonstrated against it. But the war has materially altered our situation in this respect. We cannot now do any thing of this nature, without directly supporting the cause of war and bloodshed; consequently we cannot proceed any further in this manner: for it is as decidedly against our consciences to procure

* 1 Thess. ii. 4. † 1 John iii. 21. ‡ John iii. 19. § See Mal. iii. 8, 9, 10.

a substitute, or pay an equivalent, as to render our personal services; since they equally promote the same cause. Therefore, viewing the liberty of conscience more dear to us than life itself, we feel ourselves impelled by the most sacred obligations of duty, to decline rendering our personal services, hiring substitutes, paying an equivalent, or doing any thing whatever, to aid or abet the cause of war, let the consequences be what they may.

III. By the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and of this State, our religious rights and liberty of conscience are clearly defined, and amply secured. In the first it is declared that, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Consequently, no man or set of men have a right to require the services or property of others, without their consent, or through their immediate representatives, elected by their own free suffrages.

In the Constitution of the United States, it is declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These are the fundamental principles of free government. By what authority then can we be prohibited from the free exercise of our religion? Liberty and the pursuit of happiness are declared unalienable rights. To controul or oppress the liberty of conscience, in any manner, is the most pointed violation of these rights. For there is nothing existing in the mind of man, that bears the name of liberty, so sacred as the liberty to act according to the dictates of his own conscience; nor is there any thing that can possibly so abridge the pursuit of happiness, as to prevent the free exercise of this liberty. This seems to have been duly appreciated by the wise framers of the Constitution. Hence they did not merely establish a toleration of religion; but made it a positive and fundamental principle, that no laws should be made to prohibit the free exercise thereof.

In the Constitution of the State of New-York it is declared, "That the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession

and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever hereafter be allowed within this State to all mankind. Provided that the liberty of conscience hereby granted, shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of this State."

We are far from claiming, under the name of religious liberty, an exemption from the moral obligations of civil society: any plea of this nature would at once expose its own hypocrisy. And whoever is fully acquainted with our principles and practice, will not apply the charge of licentiousness to any of our proceedings. Nor is there any thing in our tenets or institutions that can, with any propriety, be said to have the least tendency to justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the state; but directly the reverse, as we have sufficiently proved. Therefore we are, by the above declaration, not merely tolerated in our religious profession; but fully and positively secured in the free exercise and enjoyment thereof.

As the Almighty, by the very law of our existence, has given us liberty of conscience, and as by his All-wise Providence, he has put it into the hearts of the founders of this American republic, to secure this liberty by wise and equitable laws; therefore we deem it very improper to impose upon the good sense of the administrators of government, by petitioning for a right which we hold by tenure from our Creator, and which is already so clearly established by the Constitution and fundamental laws of our country. Previous to such a measure, we must, in effect, relinquish our claim to the gift of our beneficent Creator, by a virtual acknowledgment that the liberty of conscience, instead of being a gift of the Almighty, is the grant of human authority.

Dominion over conscience is the worst species of tyranny. It was this that constituted Antichrist in his worst forms; and it is that which the virtuous among mankind have groaned under for thousands of years. The experience of all ages has proved the impossibility of controuling the conscience. Fines and imprisonments, fire and sword, racks and tortures, gibbet, banishment and death have all been tried in vain, and have only proved its unconquerable nature. Therefore, every thing of a coercive nature, under whatever name, practised against conscience, must be con-

sidered as direct persecution. For if the free exercise of conscience can be abridged in one thing, why not in another? Then where is the barrier to prevent as complete tyranny as ever existed?

It may be urged that without coercive measures, government would soon lose all its authority, and be unable to protect or defend itself in any case. But however just or reasonable it may be to coerce those who give no proof of their conscientious aversion to war, is very foreign from us to say; but admitting its reasonableness, it can furnish no argument in favour of coercing conscience. The experience of all ages proves that it has never been for the strength or benefit of any government or nation to attempt to bring any man to yield his services beyond his conscience. But those nations where it has been the most practised, have been marked as the theatres of the greatest misery and destruction. We maintain, that a real conscientious man will render all the services he can to government, consistent with his duty to God, without the compulsion of human laws.

To follow peace with all men, is one principal tenet of our profession. We are far from wishing to speak disrespectfully of the rulers of our land; nor are we willing to wound or irritate the feelings of any; but we deem it a duty which we owe to ourselves, and to the public officers of government, to offer the foregoing statements, in plain and unequivocal terms, for their information. We cannot believe that the administrators of the government and constitutions of this nation and state, founded on the most benign and liberal principles ever established on earth, would ever have required our personal services, or allowed the taking of the property which we have devoted to sacred and charitable purposes, for objects so contrary to the use for which it was intended, had it not been for the want of proper information and consideration on the subject. And we confidently trust that when they are fully informed of the objects of our institution; the manner in which we have devoted ourselves and property; the conscientious feelings which have led us to this measure, and the beneficial effects of it, they will consider it just and reasonable that we should be, and that we are of right, exempt from any other sacrifices than those which we make freely and volun

tarily, agreeable to our own faith: and consequently that there is no necessity of a law to require us to do any thing as an equivalent for military services.

Note. It is worthy of the consideration of the enlightened state of New-York, that the military officers of the states of Massachusetts and New-Hampshire have wisely considered the religious and constitutional rights of our Society; and for many years have exempted our brethren, in those states, from military services, and from rendering any equivalent whatever for the same; and that their conduct in this respect, has been sanctioned by the Legislatures of those states.

The foregoing Declaration and statements, are respectfully submitted to the consideration of the civil and military officers of the state of New-York.

DAVID MEACHAM,
RICHARD SPIER,
JOHN FARRINGTON,
RUFUS BISHOP,
ABIATHER BABBIT,
DAVID OSBORN,
PETER DODGE,
JETHRO TURNER,
NATHAN SPIER,
AMOS STOWER,
ARTEMAS CLARK,
MORRELL BAKER,
DANIEL HAWKINS,
LEVI PEASE,
SETH Y. WELLS,
JOSEPH HODGSON,
EBENEZER BISHOP,
CALVIN GREEN,
SAMUEL SPIER,
STEPHEN WOODWORTH,
STEPHEN MUNSON,
CALVIN WELLS,
OLIVER TRAIN,
STEPHEN WELLS.

New-Lebanon, Feb. 2nd, 1815.

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Shakers.

A declaration of the society of people, (commonly called Shakers,) shewing their reasons for refusing to aid or abet the cause of war and bloodshed, by bearing arms, paying fines, hiring substitutes, or rendering any equivalent for military services. Albany: Printed by E. & E. Hosford, State-street 1815.

20 p. 24½cm.

Attributed by J. P. MacLean, in his A bibliography of Shaker literature, 1905, to Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells.

1. War and religion. 2. Military service, Compulsory. I. Green, Calvin. II. Wells, Seth Youngs. III. Title.

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